



**STATEMENT BY  
THE PRIME MINISTER, HON BRUCE GOLDING  
RESPONSE TO EARTHQUAKE TRAGEDY IN HAITI  
IN THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT  
Tuesday, January 19, 2010**

Jamaica, as, indeed, people throughout the world, were horrified by the terrible tragedy that befell the people of Haiti following the massive earthquake last Tuesday. Television coverage of the aftermath, the collapsed buildings, the dead bodies lying amidst the rubble, the frantic efforts to reach those still trapped beneath tons of concrete, the agony on the faces of the thousands who have lost loved ones, who writhe in pain from their injuries, not knowing when they will be attended to, whose houses have been destroyed and who have gone for days without food and water, tell the grim tale of the extent of the suffering of a people who have experienced so much human tragedy in their lives but never anything of this magnitude.

The authorities have been forced to bury the dead in hurriedly-dug mass graves without identification or even photographs. Many Haitians will never be able to bring closure to their grief; they will never know with certainty what happened to their mothers and fathers, their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive told me last Thursday that so far they had been forced to bury 7,000 people in this unceremonious way. It is reported that by Sunday, that number had risen to 70,000! The final death toll, still unknown, is likely to be considerably more than that.

The response of the international community has been swift and strong. Search and rescue teams, relief supplies, medical equipment and volunteers have poured into Port-au-Prince. The effectiveness of these efforts has been slowed because Haiti's administrative capacity, already weak even before the tragedy, has been so severely dislocated by the severity of the disaster.

Formidable challenges have to be overcome. Accessibility to some areas where people are suffering has been difficult. Fuel supplies are extremely limited as many storage facilities caved in under the quake. Telephone communications

were completely disrupted and are just now being restored. Digicel must be commended for its swift work in restoring its system to 70% functionality. Lack of electricity to recharge cell phones, however, still leaves much of the population unable to communicate.

As one of its closest neighbours and a sister member of CARICOM, Jamaica has sought to respond as much as we can to the crisis in Haiti. Immediately after the earthquake struck, a contingent of JDF personnel consisting of engineers, logisticians and medical personnel was dispatched to Haiti along with relief supplies.

On Thursday, I flew to Port-au-Prince along with the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief of Defence Staff and representatives of ODPEM, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade to view at first hand the extent of the disaster and determine how best we can assist. We held discussions with President Rene Preval, Prime Minister Bellerive and representatives of donor countries and international organizations including the United Nations.

That same evening, I briefed CARICOM Chairman, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerritt, Secretary-General Edwin Carrington and Prime Minister David Thompson who flew to Jamaica to discuss the co-ordination of CARICOM's relief efforts.

On Saturday, I held discussions with US Secretary of State, Mrs. Hillary Clinton, who made a brief stop in Jamaica following her visit to Haiti. We discussed the management of the relief efforts as well as the longer-term support that Haiti will need and we have established direct lines of communication that have already proven useful in co-ordinating our own activities. As of yesterday, JDF personnel are included in daily morning briefings at the Command Centre and are undertaking assignments requested of them.

Yesterday, I attended a special meeting in Santo Domingo convened by the government of Spain in its capacity as head of the European Union and chaired by President Leonel Fernandez, President of the Dominican Republic, to review the relief efforts and devise plans to support Haiti's recovery and rebuilding over the medium to long term.

Today, I wish to brief the House on the measures taken so far and the measures agreed on going forward.

- 159 members of the JDF including 11 officers under the direction of Major Jamie Ogilvie are currently stationed in Port-au-Prince. President Preval has tasked his Minister of the Interior to liaise with the Jamaican Major Ogilvie and, as a result, the JDF has been allowed to establish a Forward Operating Base at the eastern end of the airport. With the kind permission of Food for the Poor, they have established an Operations Centre at the Food for the Poor facility two miles away which provides space for receipt and storage of supplies prior to distribution. Yesterday, the JDF medical team also established a clinic at this facility and in its first day of operation saw over 100 patients.
- 10 members of the Jamaica Fire Brigade have been dispatched to Haiti. Along with JDF personnel they have conducted search and rescue operations resulting in four persons trapped beneath collapsed buildings being recovered alive.
- A team of 21 medical personnel led by Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, Dr. Derrick McDowell, and comprising 5 surgeons, and anaesthetist, public health specialists and medical technicians was dispatched to Haiti on Saturday. They, along with a 9-member team from the Jamaica Medical Doctors Association, were deployed to two medical facilities, the Bernard Mews Clinic and the Community Hospital in Freres. Up to yesterday, they had conducted 48 surgical operations including 9 amputations and treated a total of 106 patients, 50 of whom were seen in follow-up visits. Six babies were delivered including three that had to be delivered prematurely. Four additional orthopaedic surgeons and one anaesthetist left the island today to join the team. They will remain in Haiti for two weeks at which time they will be replaced by another team of similar number. A number of emergency field hospitals have been set up and it is likely that some of our personnel will be working at one or more of these facilities.
- Two JDF Coast Guard vessels have been used to transport troops and medical and relief supplies. Air Jamaica has also provided flights to transport troops and medical personnel to Haiti as well as to evacuate Jamaicans stranded on the island. Immigration officials were flown to Haiti to process Jamaicans wishing to return home. So far, 56 Jamaicans have been brought back home.

- The Canadian government has established an air bridge at the Norman Manley International Airport to evacuate Canadian citizens via twice daily flights using a C-130 Hercules aircraft. The Canadian government has allowed us to use the forward flights to transport equipment and supplies to Haiti including telecommunications equipment and engineers to enable Digicel to re-establish its cellular service that was disrupted by the earthquake.
- CARICOM, through the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), has designated Jamaica as its sub-regional focal point for assistance to Haiti. A logistics operations centre has been established at the Norman Manley airport to receive supplies from other Caribbean countries for delivery to Haiti. As we speak, a large vessel is being loaded in Trinidad and is expected to arrive here next Monday. CDEMA has dispatched its Regional Advance Support Team to Jamaica and it has stationed its aircraft here to support the movement of operational personnel to and from Haiti.
- CARICOM has also decided that in addition to the donations of cash and relief supplies by governments, NGOs, corporate entities and individuals of member states, emergency medical services will be its main focus and teams of medical and support personnel are being assembled for deployment in Haiti. This effort is being co-ordinated by CDEMA in conjunction with PAHO, the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), the Regional Security System (RSS) and the CARICOM Secretariat.
- The Caribbean Electric Utility Services Corporation (CARILEC) is mobilizing teams of technicians to help to restore electricity.
- A major logistical difficulty has been the inability of the Toussaint L'Ouverture International Airport to accommodate the large number of aircraft including those carrying relief supplies. The Jamaican government has offered the Norman Manley Airport as a holding area for these aircraft while they await clearance for landing at the Port-au-Prince airport.

The meeting convened in Santo Domingo yesterday which was also attended by President Preval, while discussing the co-ordination of emergency relief efforts, also focused on the challenges for Haiti's recovery and rebuilding. It decided on the following:

- (1) A Co-ordinating Committee will be set up to organize an international conference to be held in the Dominican Republic to consider a Strategic Plan for the Reconstruction of Haiti. The Committee will comprise representatives of Haiti, Dominican Republic, USA, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, UN, CARICOM, EU, OAS, Rio Group and IDB. The Committee will hold its first meeting in Montreal, Canada next Monday, coinciding with a donors' conference on Haiti which is being convened by the government of Canada. After consulting with the Chairman of CARICOM, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerritt as well as Prime Ministers Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago, David Thompson of Barbados and Hubert Ingraham of the Bahamas, I was authorized to invite former Prime Minister P.J. Patterson to be CARICOM's representative on this Committee and I am pleased that Mr. Patterson has accepted the assignment.
- (2) The Co-ordinating Committee will designate a Working Group to prepare the draft Strategic Plan for the Reconstruction of Haiti. This plan will be informed by the long-term objectives outlined in the UN Millenium Development Goals, Haiti's National Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction and the World Bank's Policy Paper "Options and Opportunities for Haiti".

The multilateral agencies have been responding to Haiti's plight.

- The World Bank has already approved a grant of US\$100 million for urgent infrastructure rehabilitation. It is also considering the financial support that Haiti will require over the next five years.
- An emergency meeting of the Board of the IDB is to decide on the contribution it will make to the rebuilding efforts. Debt forgiveness is among the issues to be considered.
- The European Union has pledged US\$306 million of assistance.
- The United Nations has launched a Flash Appeal aimed at raising US\$370 million and two-thirds of that amount has already been committed. It will also be providing daily meals for one million people, increasing to two million within a month. The UN will also be

deploying an additional 1,500 police officers and 2,000 troops to strengthen security arrangements in Haiti.

I wish to record my pride and appreciation for the heart-warming response of the Jamaican people, many of whom have made contributions from the little that they have. ODPEM has received tons of foodstuff, clothing and medical supplies donated by private sector companies and individuals. Several organizations have launched collection drives to mobilize relief supplies and bank accounts have been set up to accept cash donations. I wish to commend them all. I thank the scores of volunteers who have turned up at ODPEM's new headquarters at Haining Road to sort and package these items for delivery to the suffering people of Haiti. Cash is the best form of contribution because this allows the authorities in Haiti to convert that cash into the specific needs to which they have to respond. For those who are only able to contribute in kind, the priority needs are water, storable food and medication

I wish to commend, also, the JDF, Jamaica Fire Brigade, Ministry of Health and ODPEM for the gallant way they have responded to this crisis. We have had to co-ordinate very carefully the deployment of personnel as neither the Haitian government nor the international agencies are in a position to undertake arrangement such as accommodation, meals, transportation, etc. We have to make our own arrangements through the JDF facilities that we have established and within the capabilities that exist there.

I commend the organizations, professionals and individuals who have offered to help. Despite all our difficulties and constraints, we have reached out to our Haitian brothers and sisters in distress and it makes me especially proud to be a Jamaican.

Comments have been made about the possibility, if not likelihood, of a flood of Haitians landing on our shores. It is a real possibility for which we must prepare ourselves. The pace of relief and rebuilding efforts will determine the extent to which Haitians will feel the need to flee their own country. We have put in place the necessary arrangements to deal with the arrival of any Haitian nationals. They will be processed, confined within designated facilities, required to undergo medical screening and treatment, where necessary, and provided with temporary accommodation and care until they can be returned to their homeland. While they may not fall within the UN Convention definition of refugees, they would constitute a humanitarian cause to which we are obliged to respond appropriately. An Action Plan for the treatment of such persons has been drafted by the Ministry of Health and disseminated to the relevant agencies at the national and local levels. If necessary, we will seek the

assistance of international agencies and donor countries. We will not turn our backs on persons who have suffered a disaster worse than can be imagined. But for the grace of God, their disaster could have been ours; their relief and recovery must be part of our responsibility.

While we are thankful that we have not suffered from the effects of the earthquake, we take sombre note that since the eruption in Haiti there have been four significant earthquakes in the region:

- Venezuela 5.6 (Friday 15<sup>th</sup>)
- Argentina (off south coast) 6.3 (Sunday 17<sup>th</sup>)
- Guatemala & El Salvador 6.0 (Monday 18<sup>th</sup>)
- Cayman Islands 5.8 (Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup>)

Even as we work as hard as we can to provide assistance to the Haitian people, we are mindful of our own vulnerability in the face of this unusual instability, lying as we do on the other side of the same fault line. Our emergency services have, therefore, been placed on full alert in the event that, God forbid, a similar disaster strikes Jamaica.